

9/14/2006

**PROVIDING FOR EARMARKING REFORM
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**HON. DAVID R. OBEY
OF WISCONSIN
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SEPTEMBER 14, 2006**

Mr. Speaker, this bill represents the death of lobby reform. Over the last year, as we all know, this House has received a black eye because of the DeLay scandal, stories about lobbyists paying for golf trips to Scotland, the Cunningham blatant bribery case, the Abramoff scandal, and we have been awash in talk of reform. But

comprehensive reform packages have not been allowed to come to this floor. We have not been allowed by the majority to have votes on them.

But now, 7 weeks before the election, we get a chance to see that the majority has labored long and produced a mouse, or a fig leaf at best.

My old friend, Archie the Cockroach, said once, ``The trouble with most people is that they lose their sense of proportion; of what use is it for a queen bee to fall in love with a bull?" Think about it a minute.

The problem with this bill is that there is a huge problem and this bill proposes a minuscule solution. The answer of the

majority leadership is to require a list of what they call earmarks. But this package is more notable for what it does not include than it is for what it does include.

I would call it the 1 percent solution.

Now, my personal anger about earmarks I think is well known

in this body. The last time I chaired the Appropriations Committee there was not a single earmark in the Labor-H appropriation bill. Today there are over 1,200. And 3 years ago the Labor-H Subcommittee used the earmarks as blackmail by threatening to cut off earmarks for any Member who refused to vote for an inadequate bill. I did not especially like that and I made that quite clear. But the point is that the problem is not

earmarks. It is the abuse of the earmark process.

This proposal does nothing to ensure institutional integrity. It is consumer fraud masquerading as earmark reform. Look at what it does not cover: It applies only to committee reported bills. It exempts managers' amendments. That means the famous "Bridge to

Nowhereâ€ would be exempted from this bill. On tax earmarks this bill actually makes the existing law worse. Right now a tax earmark is defined as a special treatment for 100 or fewer persons. This bill says the only time that it is going to be counted as a tax earmark is if it affects one entity. That means you can have a huge tax break for two multinational oil companies and it isn't even covered in this package.

In the 1986 tax bill, there were 340 separate transition rules costing over \$10 billion. There were special tax breaks for two Chrysler plants. This bill wouldn't cover it. The only way that that would be exposed under this bill is if there had only been one tax break for one of those Chrysler plants.

The tax bill that passed last year that provided special treatment for ceiling fan imports or for U.S. horse and dog racing or Hollywood studios that produce the movies in the Gulf, all exempt under this bill.

There were 190 special provisions in the Pension Protection Act of 2000, costing \$180 million in taxpayers' money--virtually all of them

would be exempt under this proposition.

If you want to save taxpayers' dollars, rather than continuing this silly game of Trivial Pursuit, what you would do is to require that reconciliation bills can be used only to reduce the deficit rather than increase it as the majority party has cynically used the reconciliation process the last 4 years. This bill,

indeed, is Trivial Pursuit.

I don't care if you list the Members who sponsor earmarks. I put out press releases on every one of them. I attended a ceremony last week where we had a groundbreaking for an expansion of the Mel Laird Medical Center in my district. I got that earmark. I am proud of it, and I am proud to stand for it.

The problem is what this package doesn't contain.

This is a joke. It is a fraud. It plays Trivial Pursuit. It focuses on the minutiae instead of the big problems. That should not be surprising given the track record of the majority party in this House. But this House ought to be able to do better.

